



THE NEW REPUBLIC

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A new plan for nuclear peace.

THE FORK IN THE ROAD

BY ALBERT GORE JR.

War is an old habit of thought, an old frame of mind, an old political technique, that must now pass as human sacrifice and human slavery have passed. —HERMAN WOUK

BEFORE WE CAN REACH a meaningful arms control agreement with the Soviet Union, we must first reach an agreement among ourselves about what we are seeking. Four Administrations, counting the present one, have attempted to reach strategic arms control agreements with the Soviet Union. Each has come into office having rejected part or all of what was accomplished by its predecessor, and each has spent years in the pursuit of its own conceptions and political obligations. In the process, much that was serviceable and worth having has been discarded in the hope

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of something better. The time has come for the country as a whole to settle on some priorities in arms control—and to pursue them with as much single-mindedness as we can muster.

Advocates of an across-the-board nuclear freeze and advocates of a massive nuclear weapons buildup now believe they are engaged in a debate with no middle ground. Each side sincerely believes that the course it is recommending for the United States is the best way to prevent a nuclear war, and each side accuses the other of harboring irrational fears that could serve to make nuclear war more likely.

Freeze advocates argue that the Reagan Administration's fear of Soviet nuclear forces and of their current edge in "counterforce" capability is irrational, because it discounts the massive retaliatory power of those parts of our own nuclear force that would survive any Soviet first strike. The Administration, on the other hand, sees the freeze movement as a manifestation of

fear that is irrational in its rejection of steps which are required in order to deter the Soviets.

But amid the growing debate there are surprising signs of a possible convergence of views which might support a viable American consensus for arms control. Advocates of a freeze and advocates of a massive nuclear force buildup have more in common than they may realize.

It is obvious that the counterforce weapons now in the hands of the Soviet Union constitute the greatest source of concern to Americans. President Reagan stated this concern succinctly in his March 31 press conference: "The Soviets' great edge is one in which they could absorb our retaliatory blow and hit us again." This reference to our "retaliatory blow" obviously presumes a first strike against us by the nuclear forces of the Soviet Union.

Advocates of a nuclear freeze argue that it is madness to suppose that the Soviets would dare launch a first strike on our ICBM fields, and risk the annihilation of Russia by our submarine and bomber forces. But they cannot deny that the counterforce issue has become the focus of strategic policy in the United States and the Soviet Union, and that it is the cutting edge of the arms race. Indeed, these same critics argue against the deployment of U.S. counterforce weapons precisely because they might increase Soviet nervousness about a U.S. first strike.

FIRST OF ALL, we should give the President's case a careful hearing. President Reagan, like President Carter before him, knows perfectly well that our submarine and bomber forces have the ability to pulverize Soviet civilization in retaliation for a first strike against our ICBM fields. The prevailing scenario that is driving our current strategic buildup is different: if the Soviets successfully destroy our ICBM fields and our bomber bases (along with any bombers caught on the ground and any submarines in port for maintenance), and if they use only a fraction of their own ICBM force

to do so, then our Commander in Chief would have a difficult choice to make. If he ordered a retaliatory attack on Soviet cities, then the Soviet ICBMs held in reserve would be loosed upon American cities, thus killing millions of people—people who might be saved if the President decided to capitulate instead. If, on the other hand, he had another option at his disposal—that of firing counterforce missiles of our own at all of the Soviet missiles held in reserve after their first strike—then he would at least have an alternative to annihilation or capitulation.

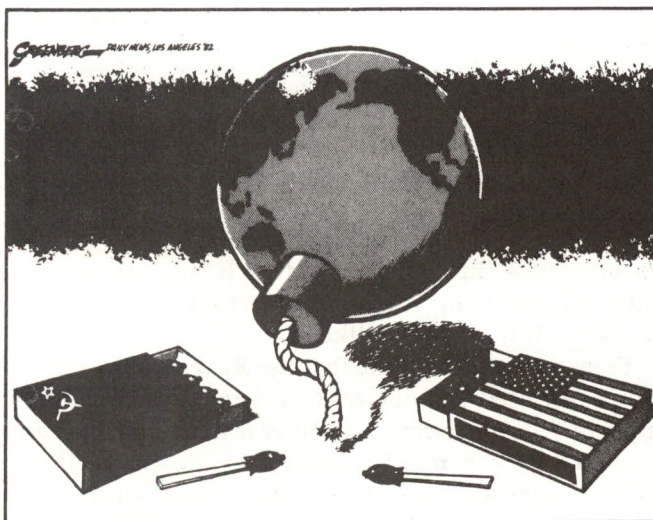
Many serious analysts reject this scenario, beginning with its first premises: they deny that a first strike against U.S. silos would ever look attractive to any sane Soviet leader. But be that as it may, challenges to the logic of a first strike have been unable to dispel the fear of one—a fear that is based on careful calculations that such a strike is now at least mathematically possible for the Soviets, who have equipment of the necessary sophistication, and in the necessary numbers, to do that job.

WE NOW have two weapons systems under development that are designed to give the President a "third option" of retaliating against any Soviet ICBMs held in reserve after a preemptive first strike. They are the MX missile, which is currently in search of a survivable basing mode, and the Trident II D-5 missile, to be placed aboard the new Ohio-class submarines. Neither will be deployed until the end of the current decade, and until they are, we are said to have a "window of vulnerability"—vulnerability, that is, to intimidation, because we are theoretically open to the blackmail which might follow the kind of first strike presumed by President Reagan in the scenario he noted in his press conference.

Because of their accuracy, however, counterforce weapons like the MX and the Trident D-5 are by nature potential first-strike weapons, whatever the intentions of their builders. So a side effect of our effort to close our window of vulnerability will be to open a window of vulnerability on the Soviets. Moreover, the Soviet window will be a proportionately more serious matter for them. Our nuclear forces are relatively well distributed among land-, air-, and sea-based launchers—but the Soviets have almost 80 percent of their nuclear warheads on land-based ICBMs.

Yet it is clearly not in our interest to open a Soviet window of vulnerability if our objective in all of this is to diminish the chances of nuclear war. Unless we and the Soviets change from the path we are heading down, we will create a situation in which each side will have so much to lose if it hesitates to act during a crisis that both sides will be forced to keep their nuclear forces on a hair-trigger alert. And in each subsequent crisis, fear and intentional deception will play more prominent roles.

There is an emerging consensus among both liberals



FIRST-STRIKE CAPABILITY / CARTOON BY STEVE GREENBERG

and conservatives that we must avoid this outcome, and that we should look to arms control as the means for doing so. As the *New York Times* stated in a recent editorial, "The stability of mutual deterrence requires not a precise equality of forces but their relative invulnerability. And that should be the first objective. Specifically, talks now should aim to reduce the Soviet threat to American land-based missiles and to avoid creation of an American threat to Russia's."

It is important to note that a freeze alone, whatever its merits, would not accomplish this result. Neither would ratification of the SALT II treaty—or, to put it another way, SALT II would not alleviate the fear of a first strike which President Reagan expressed both during his recent press conference and during his campaign. Moreover, the current movement to reopen Senate consideration of SALT II vastly underestimates the opposition not only of the Administration and of powerful voices within it, but also of key Senators now in the majority, including the majority leader, Howard Baker. There is about as much chance of President Reagan and Senator Baker allowing ratification of SALT II as there is of President Reagan and Senator Laxalt resurrecting the MX "racetrack" plan.

AGAINST THIS background, I have proposed a set of detailed guidelines for a new, comprehensive strategic arms agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union—a proposed agreement which selects counterforce weapons as its focus. The proposal has two phases. The first phase is a selective freeze on any additions to the counterforce inventory of either side and on any improvements to counterforce weapons currently deployed. This might also be described as a "negotiators' pause," designed to give breathing room to the negotiators by slowing the momentum of technical development at the cutting edge of the arms race. This selective moratorium would be followed immediately by negotiations for reductions, which would begin with the synchronized dismantling of the remaining counterforce weapons on both sides, starting with the MIRVed version of the Soviet SS18. In return for substantially larger reductions on the Soviet side, the U.S. would agree not to deploy the MX or the Trident D-5, although development and testing of both would be allowed to continue as a hedge against the breakdown of negotiations. To maintain mutual deterrence, the agreement would mandate replacement of MIRVed ICBMs with a new, less destabilizing type: an ICBM carrying just one warhead.

If both sides were to carry out this change, neither would ever be in a position to make the arithmetic of a first strike work. Although either side could attack the other's ICBMs, the attacker would have to use up his entire ICBM inventory and a very large proportion of his submarine-based missiles to do the job. Detailed calculations have convinced me that under these circumstances, the side that struck first would find itself

at a disadvantage even against the residual forces of its enemy.

At the same time, in order to constrain the overall nuclear force available to each side, the totals of strategic launchers—ICBMs, SLBMs, and heavy bombers—should be limited, and reduced. It seems reasonable, as a first step, to take a number already familiar to both sides through SALT II: 2,250 systems. The Soviets have already accepted this ceiling, a number which would entail a 10-percent reduction of their currently deployed launchers.

Within the contours of this agreement, each side would retain great flexibility to redesign its remaining nuclear forces if it wished to do so, in order to protect against the reappearance of the vulnerability problem. The U.S. could either continue with existing programs, or make some changes. We could, for example, rethink our decision on B-1, and we could also have a second look at whether the entire submarine-launched missile force should be concentrated in a relatively small number of large Ohio-class submarines, as presently intended.

The essential point, however, is that once each side recalculated its land-based systems by getting rid of MIRVed ICBMs, both sides would be in a much better position to continue the arms control process in an atmosphere less fraught with mutual apprehension. Moreover, the process of moving into deep reductions would already be well underway. For example, as compared to SALT II, the number of nuclear warheads available to either side would be on the order of 50 percent less.

As an interesting consequence of the reductions, the Soviet advantage in throw-weight would be substantially narrowed, and, in fact, the United States would have the ability to achieve equal throw-weight if it chose to do so. Moreover, the number of ICBMs would turn out to be equal.

All elements of the proposal are verifiable with a high degree of certainty by using a variety of methods within the scope of "national technical means." (However, the Soviets could increase the chances for ratification of this or any other proposal by agreeing to additional means of verification.)

THE CHIEF OBSTACLE to an agreement along these lines appears to be cynicism about the arms control process itself on both the left and the right. And, once again, the two sides have more in common than they seem to realize. According to Roger Molander, organizer of the "Ground Zero" movement, the overriding problem is "the basic character of the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union." And according to strategic planners in the Reagan Administration, the principal problem is the Soviet Union's "attitude" that nuclear war is simply an extreme form of political force to be used, or implicitly threatened, in order to gain political objectives.

It is true that the character of the relationship between the U.S. and the Soviet Union is the central problem, and it is also true that Soviet aggression has frustrated the easing of tensions. (The invasion of Afghanistan, for example, stopped consideration of the SALT II treaty, and the coup in Poland prevented an early resumption of strategic arms negotiations.)

But the possession of counterforce weapons is not merely subsidiary to the relationship between the countries. These weapons create fear and distrust in the relationship. Throughout the history of humankind, the tools we have chosen to use have affected consciousness itself. Tools shape our awareness and make demands upon their possessors. Counterforce weapons have themselves made nuclear war "thinkable" again. They are at once deadly threats and tempting targets. So long as they remain in our arsenals, each side will claw for marginal advantages over the other with increasingly bizarre and deceptive measures and countermeasures to ensure the survivability of the weapons themselves.

Although both conservatives and liberals have responded favorably to the plan I have put forward, observers in both groups have noted that one of its critical features trades Soviet systems that are already deployed, for U.S. systems that are still in development. For this reason, they have predicted that the Soviets would not give serious consideration to such a plan. This criticism overlooks the asymmetry of U.S. and Soviet strategic forces: specifically, the fact that 80 percent of the Soviet Union's nuclear military power would be vulnerable to a first strike on their land-based ICBMs, while only 25 percent of our own forces would be. This may be why a group of high-ranking Soviet arms control experts unilaterally brought up this proposal during two separate meetings with a visiting private delegation from the United States. (See box, above.)

The agreement I have proposed would undeniably

reduce the likelihood of nuclear war by making a first strike against the ICBMs of the other once again "unthinkable." Surprisingly, there are some who believe that this might be unwise, for two reasons. First, they worry that if the Soviets think our nuclear forces are stalemated, then this perception might encourage them to press their luck, and that a miscalculation could then lead to nuclear war. Second, some worry that the U.S. would have no alternative in such a war

but to carry out the doctrine of "Mutual Assured Destruction" by attacking Soviet cities.

It is precisely at this point that clear judgment is required to save our civilization. This is the fork in the road.

The arid language of "surgical first strikes" and "nuclear exchanges" can lull us into forgetting the devastation they would cause. Estimates of U.S. deaths resulting from strikes against missile silos alone range as high as 20 million. The number of casualties in case of a U.S. first strike against Soviet ICBM fields would also be very high. And an attack against missile silos is hardly the limit of what either side would have to do to carry out a full-scale counterforce strike. The list of priority targets would include bomber bases, submarine ports,

command and control centers of both military and civil systems, and others. The civilian casualties resulting from an attack against this set of targets would add more scores of millions of deaths.

Do we really believe that the response from the victim of such an attack would be rational, measured, or constrained? That it would not be driven by rage, grief, and revenge to exact the highest possible penalties? The answer is clear. We must make nuclear war less likely, not more likely. If the Administration chooses wisely at this fork in the road, we will have a better opportunity to create a relationship with the Soviet Union which deters aggression—and which condemns war as "an old habit of thought that must now pass."

A MOSCOW NIBBLE?

Are the Soviet leaders interested in the arms control proposal outlined in the accompanying article? A group of Americans visiting Moscow on a trip arranged by the Institute for Policy Studies were told by Oleg Bykov, a leading arms control expert and director of the Institute of World Economics and International Relations, and Georgi Arbatov, a member of the Central Committee and director of the Institute for U.S.A. and Canada Studies, that the Gore proposal was "an interesting basis for negotiations." Of those Americans present, only former Representative Donald Fraser, now mayor of Minneapolis, knew much about the proposal, which at the time had appeared only in the *Congressional Record*. To Fraser's surprise, the Soviets seemed well-versed in the details of the proposal, which, unbidden, they brought up twice. They indicated that once broad arms control discussions were under way, they would be prepared to negotiate on throw-weight, counterforce, and MIRVs. This, then, is perhaps the first significant sign of Soviet interest in a particular arms reduction proposal since the signing of SALT II. If they are serious, Arbatov, their leading Americanologist and a frequent Washington visitor—the well-publicized cancellation of his visa last year notwithstanding—should make Soviet interest in the Gore plan better known here.

THE EDITORS